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Moi je ne sais pas vs. Je ne sais pas moi:
French Disjoint Pronouns in the Left vs. Right Periphery

Ulrich Detges and Richard WALTEREIT

This paper compares left- and right-peripheral uses of first-person strong pronouns in spoken French. We define left and right periphery in terms of a model of the French sentence proposed by Morel (2007) and Danon-Boileau (1991). Our analysis shows that both in the left and the right periphery, strong first-person pronouns can in principle serve modal (subjective and intersubjective) as well as coherence-related functions. At first glance, this seems to refute a “strong” version of the working hypothesis outlined in the introduction of this volume. However, data from a corpus of spoken French show that modal and coherence-related functions are unevenly distributed between left and right periphery. In the left periphery, coherence-related functions are predominant, whereas they are extremely rare in the right periphery. Conversely, modal (i.e. subjective and intersubjective) uses do occur in the left periphery, especially within parenthetical constructions of the type *moi je trouve*, ‘I think’, but are markedly more frequent in the right periphery, where they make up for more than 90% of uses of strong pronouns. This striking asymmetry is a reflex of the different functions of left and right periphery as such. Whereas the left periphery serves to *anchor* the upcoming utterance (cognitively, discourse-structurally and epistemically), the right periphery is a locus where aspects of the completed utterance can be *re-negotiated*.

1. Centre and periphery

In this paper, we will discuss certain asymmetries in the behaviour of French strong pronouns when used either in the left or the right periphery of the sentence. Our analysis draws on a model of the French sentence proposed by Morel (2007) and Danon-Boileau et al. (1991). According to these authors, the core clause – the *rhème* – is an obligatory element which may optionally be preceded by the so-called *preamble* (see (1)) and followed by the *post-script* (originally termed *post-rhème* by Morel 2007 and Danon-Boileau et al. 1991). The preamble, in turn, may consist of smaller optional subunits. These include, among other things, “binding” elements with phatic function (*tu vois* ‘you see’ in (1)), expressions of “viewpoint” (*moi* ‘I’), frame elements (*hier* ‘yesterday’ and *en classe* ‘in school’) locating the rheme in time and space, and finally lexical topic expressions, i.e. expressions referring to the element which the respective rheme will be about. Spoken French has phrasal accent. Therefore, the different components of the phrase model in (1) all correspond to intonational units with conventional prosodic contours. Among these, the post-script has a characteristic prosodic contour of its own (see below, section 5.2.). By contrast, the various elements of the preamble

are marked individually by a topic intonation contour (see Mertens 2011). Thus, the model sketched in (1) combines information-structural, syntactic, and prosodic criteria.

(1)

Preamble					Rheme	*P.S.
Binder	Viewpt.	Frame	Frame	Lexical topic		
<i>Tu vois</i>	<i>moi</i>	<i>hier</i>	<i>en classe</i>	<i>y avait un mec</i>	<i>qui me fait rire</i>	<i>quoi</i>
‘See	I	yesterday	in school	there was a guy	who makes me laugh	you know’

For our purposes, the model (1) offers two advantages. First, it allows us to define the rather vague notions of centre and periphery in more precise terms. The centre of the French sentence is the (obligatory and tightly structured) rheme. By contrast, preamble and post-script are optional and grammatically less structured (see Detges 2013). They can be identified as left and right periphery, respectively. Yet another advantage of this model is that it assigns a precise place to the strong pronouns of French. As can be seen from examples (2.a-c), where the respective strong pronoun is marked by the label *S*, their realization is mainly confined to the preamble and the rheme, i.e. to the left and right periphery. The only exceptions to this rule are cases where a strong pronoun is governed by a preposition – in this case it may be realized within the rheme (see 3.a, b). By virtue of these positional restrictions the strong pronouns are in complementary distribution with the weak (or clitic) pronouns of French (labelled as *W* in (2) and (3)), which, in turn, never appear outside the rheme and are never governed by prepositions.

(2)

Preamble	Rheme
a. <i>Toi_S</i> ,	<i>tu_W</i> m’as fait rire
b. * <i>Tu_W</i> ,	<i>tu_W</i> m’as fait rire
c. <i>Toi_S</i> ,	* <i>toi_S</i> m’as fait rire
‘You	you made me laugh’

(3)

Preamble	Rheme
a. <i>Toi_S</i> ,	<i>je_W</i> suis content <i>de toi_S</i>
b. <i>Toi_S</i> ,	* <i>je_W</i> suis content <i>de tu_W</i>
‘(You)	I am pleased with you’

(4)	Rheme	P.S.
	a. <i>Tu_w</i> m'as fait rire	<i>toi_s</i>
	b. * <i>Tu_w</i> m'as fait rire	<i>tu_w</i>
	'You made me laugh	'you'

These clear-cut rules apply only, though, to first- and second-person strong pronouns. By contrast, strong third-person pronouns may appear within the rheme (*lui m'a fait rire* 'he made me laugh'). Moreover, for the remaining forms of the paradigm, homonymy between strong and weak pronouns makes it impossible to distinguish on independent grounds whether a given token is an instance of the strong or the weak series. However, for reasons which will become clearer in the following sections, we will concentrate on first-person strong pronouns, where the distinction is unproblematic. Our paper is based on an analysis of the ELICOP version of the *Corpus Orléans*, a corpus of spontaneous French conversations recorded in the 1960s, now freely accessible on the web. While more recent corpora of French are available, we chose this one because of its excellent search facilities.

2. Left vs. right periphery as objects of inquiry

The left periphery of the sentence was extensively explored in functionalist linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s and in generative linguistics in the 1990s and 2000s. Key construction-types included left dislocation, right dislocation, topicalization, and "hanging topic" (cf. Lambrecht 1981, Carroll 1982, Barnes 1985, to name just a few). Early research looked at the peripheries mostly from the point of view of syntactic representation and pragmatic function. The aim was an appropriate characterization of how those constructions differed from what was perceived as the canonical, unmarked, sentence. In addition to this, the matter was framed as a question of differences between spontaneous spoken discourse *versus* planned written style, often with the assumption that those constructions reflect the constraints of real-time speech production rather than being conventional grammatical objects in their own right. More recently, increased availability of acoustical analyses has led to a shift to the prosodic characteristics of those constructions (for French, see e.g. Doetjes et al. 2002). Furthermore, they now tend to be seen as conventional constructions of the language, not only as a last-resort option reflecting real-time formulation constraints. A key finding supporting the latter move was that the peripheries are not typically separated from the core by a pause, contrary to what was often previously assumed.

Left and right periphery have enjoyed some attention as objects of inquiry in their own right. We are going to briefly review some of this work. From a minimalist perspective, De Cat (2007a) stresses that there are no genuine syntactic differences between left and right dislocation and that any difference found between the two constructions is to be located in general characteristics of the peripheries, not the syntax. A key feature of the left periphery identified as responsible for the characteristics of the left periphery (as opposed to the right one) is “prosodic salience” (2007a: 161-164).

In his seminal study on French left and right dislocation, Lambrecht (1981) identified morpho-syntactic as well as pragmatic properties of left and right dislocation, called “topic” and “antitopic” respectively. These properties (and hence the asymmetry found between “topic” and “antitopic”) were motivated on the basis of information structure.

Further to the observed differences between left and right periphery, Bossong (1981) and Nølke (1998) have claimed that right dislocation carries some emotive value. This resonates with Morel’s (2007: 42) claim that the post-rheme arises from an “unexpected judgment”. Thus, according to these authors, the right periphery is somehow associated with stance.

The picture emerging from this overview is that the left periphery is associated with information structure functions and coherence-building, whereas the right periphery is reserved for subjective and interpersonal or modal functions. However, we do find those interpersonal/modal functions in the left periphery, too – the “binder” *tu vois* and “viewpoint” *moi* in example (1) clearly indicate stance. Moreover, the “binder’s” function is interpersonal in that *tu vois* expresses an expectation of convergence of speaker’s and hearer’s views. Thus, we need a larger model of the functions of the left vs. the right periphery that accommodates those apparent contradictions. We will attempt this in this paper, taking the French strong pronoun *moi* as a test case.

3. French strong pronouns

Usage of strong pronouns is characterized by striking frequency asymmetries. These do not only concern person, e.g. the distribution of first- and third-person pronouns, but – perhaps less expectedly – differences between the left and the right peripheries (as defined in section 1). The figures presented in table 1 are from the ELICOP corpus.

	Left	Right
1s <i>moi</i>	240	41
3s <i>lui</i>	15	1

Table 1: Frequency asymmetries in the distribution of strong pronouns

As in many other languages, the (strong) pronouns of French, especially the first-person singular forms, tend to occur as subjects of stance expressions as in (5). Normally, these are built around a “cognitive” verb (Fetzer & Johansson 2010), i.e. a verb expressing a belief or an attitude on behalf of the subject (normally the speaker him/herself). Due to their high frequency, these expressions have a more or less frozen form. This does not exclude, however, their usage with or without strong pronouns (see below, section 6.1., especially table 8). In the literature, they are usually referred to as *parentheticals*. This notion reflects their syntactic status as phrases which are inserted in sentences from which they are structurally independent (Fetzer & Johansson 2010: 241). In the remainder of this article, we will refer to them as *parenthetical expressions* or simply as *parentheticals*, as opposed to free, non-formulaic uses of strong pronouns.

(5) Parenthetical expression

Moi je pense que ça doit être ça non? (ELICOP, Moi 113)

Me I think that it must be that no

‘(I) I think that this must be it, no?’

Parentheticals are extremely frequent in conversation. In fact, they are among the quantitatively most important contexts for strong pronouns in French (for first person *moi*, see table 2). In principle, the pronoun can appear in the left periphery of the expression (*moi, je pense*) as well as to its right (*je pense, moi*). As follows from table 2, the tendency of first person *moi* to appear in the right periphery is greater in parentheticals than in free use. The reason for this is the high frequency of one particular expression, namely *je ne sais pas, moi* (see section 6.2.).

	Left	Right
Free uses	160	21
Parentheticals	80	20

Table 2: First person *moi* in the left vs. right periphery of free vs. parenthetical expressions

In the remainder of this article, we shall discuss four cases separately, namely: a) free left-peripheral uses of strong pronouns (section 4), b) free right-peripheral uses (section 5), c) left-peripheral uses in parentheticals (section 6.1.) and d) right-peripheral uses in parentheticals (sections 6.2. and 6.3.). It will become clear that in free uses as well as in parenthetical expressions, the different effects attached to right vs. left peripheral uses are basically of the same kind.

4. Free uses in the left periphery

In this section, we will discuss various functions of strong pronouns in the left periphery. As we shall see, all of these functions are relatively frequent. Given that they concern different levels of language (grammar as well as discourse), there is much overlap between them.

4.1. Referential contrast

The most basic function of strong pronouns is the expression of a referential contrast of some kind. Following Mayol (2010), we distinguish different types of contrasts. Thus, in (6), *moi* ‘I’ contrasts the person of the speaker with one particular, clearly identified entity. In (6), this entity is explicitly indicated by *lui* ‘he’. In other cases it may be inferable from the context. In all of these cases, we will speak of an exhaustive, definite or “strong” contrast. Indicating a contrast between the referent in question and other ones clearly serves the purpose of propositional coherence:

(6) Exhaustive (“strong”) contrast

Moi je en gagne des fois 90,000, *lui* il en gagne 400,000. (ELICOP, Moi 385)

Me I of.it earn INDEF times 90,000 he he of.it earns 400,000

‘I sometimes earn 90,000, he earns 400,000.’

In other cases, the strong pronoun indicates a contrast of the respective referent with unidentified entities. In such cases, we speak of an uncertain, indefinite or “weak” contrast (see 7). This type of contrast is pragmatically interesting in that it lends itself to certain rhetorical manipulations.

(7) Uncertain (“weak”) contrast

Enfin, *moi* je me prends pas pour quelqu’un de supérieur (ELICOP, Moi 279)

Finally me I me take NEG for someone of superior

‘At least, *I* don’t think of myself as someone superior.’

INFERENCE: ‘But there are people who do.’

The potential of indicating a referential contrast of some sort could be viewed as the lexical meaning of the strong pronouns. As shown in table 3, the cases in which *moi* signals a strong or weak contrast represent more than half of total occurrences. However, table 3 also shows that cases in which *moi* has lost its contrast-indicating function are far from rare.

contrast	strong	12%	58%
	weak	46%	
others			42%

Table 3: First-person *moi* indicating (strong and weak) referential contrast

4.2. Topic-shift

Topic-shift is a quantitatively important context for strong pronouns, particularly in the first person. Topic-shift operations, where some old discourse-topic is replaced by a new one (Stark 1999), may be conceived of as construing a contrast between new and old topic, i.e., as a contrast at discourse-level. As can be seen from example (8), use of a first-person *moi* ‘I’ does not necessarily imply that the speaker establishes herself as the new discourse-topic. In (8) reference to the speaker is a way of starting to *elaborate the new topic*, similar to the “viewpoint” in (1). In (8), the eventual new topic is the speaker’s father, i.e. an entity closely related to her. Reference to the speaker – the most salient real-world entity given in the situation – thus functions as a cognitive “anchor”, indicating that the current speaker’s

universe is the overall domain from which the eventual new topic will be derived. For this reason, the first-person pronoun in example (8) finds itself in the leftmost position of the preamble, followed by the NPs *mes parents* ‘my parents’ and *mon père* ‘my father’ which serve to narrow down this domain in two successive metonymic shifts (again similar to Morel’s example in (1)). In such cases, first-person *moi* does not indicate a *referential* contrast in the strict sense of the term. Rather, it indicates a shift of interest which, in turn, is based on a contrast between the current speaker’s universe and the universe(s) of some other potential speaker(s).

(8) Elaboration of topic

Moi mes parents mon père était sous-chef de gare (ELICOP, Moi 48)

Me my parents my father was second-head of station

‘I my parents my father was second head of station.’

From what has been said so far, it follows that strong pronouns are used in topic-shift contexts to ensure discourse coherence. Thus, whereas marking of a referential contrast ensures textual coherence at the *content*-level (see 4.1.), topic-shift is a contrast at the level of *discourse structure*.

As mentioned earlier, topic shift is a relatively important function for strong pronouns, especially for first-person singular *moi*. In the *Corpus Orléans* it represents exactly 50% of the latter’s overall uses. As can be seen from table 4, the degree of overlap between the uses of *moi* as a topic-shift device on the one hand and as a way of expressing referential contrast on the other hand is rather limited.

topic-shift	with referential contrast	29%	50%
	without referential contrast	21%	
others			50%

Table 4: First person *moi* in topic-shift contexts

4.3. Turn-taking

It has often been observed (e.g. Stark 1997) that first-person singular strong pronouns play an important role in contexts of turn-taking (for a pragmatic explanation, see, e.g. Detges &

Waltereit 2011). As can be seen in (9), they establish a contrast at the level of discourse roles, thereby marking a transition of the floor from one speaker to the next. Example (9) represents a situation of competition between two speakers (B and C) who simultaneously seek the floor.¹ Thus, in such contexts, the pronouns organize the dialogical structure of the discourse. Moreover, as is shown in (9), they can also be considered as special instances of the topic-shift construction. It seems thus clear that the particular function under discussion here also has to do with textual coherence, albeit at the level of interactional coherence (allocation of speaker roles and their alignment), as opposed to transactional coherence (internal structure of turns at talk, cf. Hansen 1998).

(9) First-person strong pronouns in turn-taking contexts (ELICOP, *Moi* 371-372).

- A: Vous pensez qu'on enseigne mieux dans l'école libre
 You think that-one teaches better in DEF-school free
 'Do you think that teaching is better in private schools?'
- B: *Moi* je pense
 Me I think
 'I think that...'
- C: Non *moi* il y a une chose au collège [...] qui se passe
 No me it there has INDEF thing at middle.school REL REFL go.on
 'No *I* there's something going on at the collège'

As can be seen in table 5, a still large share of 1s strong pronouns (roughly a third) is used in contexts of turn-taking.

A further usage, metonymically derived from the role of first-person pronouns in turn-taking, is their function as quotation markers, as in (10). In such cases, *moi* indicates the beginning of the protagonist's speech (as opposed to the beginning of his turn). By the same token, it signals a contrast of perspective, i.e., a shift from the narrator's point of view to the protagonist's perspective – in (10), both are identical with the speaker. Thus, *moi* 'I' has become, in such contexts, a device for structuring interactional coherence.

¹ It should be mentioned, however, that the ELICOP version of the *Corpus Orléans* does not explicitly mark overlaps.

(10) First-person strong pronouns as quotation markers

On discutait ensemble, j'ai dit *moi* je sais pas (ELICOP, Moi 100)

one debated together I have said me I know NEG

'We had a debate, and I said well *I* don't know.'

As a quotation marker, *moi* is relatively rare. This function accounts for only 4% of the occurrences of *moi* (see table 5).

Turn-taking contexts	29%
Quotation	4%
Others	67%

Table 5: First person *moi* in contexts of turn-taking and quotation

As we have seen so far, at least three major discourse functions of left-peripheral strong pronouns – referential contrast, topic shift and turn-taking – are related to the overall purpose of ensuring discourse coherence. These functions are located on different levels of discourse organisation. Thus, there is overlap between them. This, in turn, means that it makes no sense to simply add the numbers given in tables 3-5 in order to get an exact quantitative assessment of the overall importance of discourse coherence for left-peripheral strong pronouns. However, it does make sense to invert the perspective: Are there functions of left-peripheral strong pronouns which are clearly *not* related to discourse coherence?

4.4. Strong speech acts

As noted in earlier work (Detges 2003), first-person strong pronouns are regularly used in order to give more illocutionary force to certain types of speech acts. This effect has been described in the literature on strong pronouns as a strategy of “pragmatic weight” (Davidson 1996: 551). This label covers, among other things, the traditional notion of ‘emphasis’. Such an effect can be observed in the following example.

(11) Strong first-person pronoun in strong speech act (ELICOP, Moi 11)

Je peux vous donner la certitude que *moi* je vous les ferai les manches

I can you give DEF certainty that me I you 3PL make.FUT DEF sleeves

‘I can assure you that *I* shall make them for you, these sleeves.’

In (11) *moi* is used in order to strengthen the commissive speech act ‘I shall make them for you, these sleeves’ by emphatically referring to speaker as the source of the illocution. Its function here is to “anchor” the speech act (and the ensuing self-obligation) in the speaker. This, it can be argued, is an inherently modal function. Crucially, in the context where (11) appears in the *Corpus Orléans*, *moi* is not denoting a contrast with respect to any other protagonist (e.g. another person who would have promised to tailor the sleeves in question but failed to do so). Moreover, it is used here in spite of straightforward topic-continuity (the topic in this and the preceding clauses being the speaker herself). This means that in (11) *moi* no longer expresses a referential contrast. Thus, rather than encoding information-structural meaning, the construction acquires expressive meaning which may often be expressed by the same form (cf. Lambrecht 1994: 239). No more than 22% of all uses of *moi* in the *Corpus Orléans* appear in the context of a strong speech act as in (11).

Strong speech acts	22%
Others	78%

Table 6: First-person *moi* in contexts of strong speech acts

4.5. Left-peripheral first-person strong pronouns are anchors

In table 7, we give the quantitative distribution of *moi* over the various functions discussed so far. Since there is considerable overlap between these functions, their percentages do not add up to 100%.

Referential contrast	58%	Coherence
Topic shift	50%	
Turn-taking	29%	
Strong speech acts	22%	Modality

Table 7: Quantitative distribution of *moi* over different discourse functions

These figures call for two remarks. Firstly, the left periphery shows a pronounced bias for coherence-related functions. Secondly, however, the figures show that modal functions do occur in the left periphery, thereby contradicting Detges' & Beeching's working hypothesis. Thus, despite a clear preference for coherence-related functions, the left periphery does, in fact, allow strong pronouns with modal functions.

However, it seems to us that all of the left-peripheral functions discussed so far, i.e. coherence-related as well as modal, have something in common. No matter what their precise function, all left-peripheral strong pronouns are *anchors*. When indicating a referential contrast (see (6), (7)), they are anchors for reference-tracking. As markers of a topic-shift they often act as anchors for the elaboration of the eventual topic as in *moi, mes parents, mon père* [...] (see (8)). In case the strong pronoun is identical with the topic, it functions as an anchor for the rheme by indicating the latter's domain. As turn-taking devices, left-peripheral strong pronouns anchor the upcoming turn in a particular speaker. Finally, when introducing a strong speech act, the strong pronoun explicitly anchors the latter in the person of the speaker, thereby conferring the speech act greater illocutionary strength (see (11)). In this sense, anchoring the upcoming rheme either at the level of proposition, discourse or illocution (or at two or all three of these levels at the same time) is "the" function of the left periphery.

5. Free uses in the right periphery

Let us now turn to the major right-peripheral functions of strong pronouns. As we have seen, strong pronouns are significantly less frequent in the right periphery than in the left one (see above, table 2). Moreover, their functions here do not simply mirror the uses discussed in section 4.

5.1. Right-peripheral strong pronouns as referential antitopics

As is widely known, the simplest function of right-peripheral NPs is to "repair" referential gaps by providing appropriate lexical information (see (10)).

(12) Have you seen *this one* – (I mean:) *that CAR*?

Given that strong pronouns – as all pronouns – do not convey lexical information, we would expect them to be excluded from this use altogether. However, in the *Corpus Orléans*, there is

an attestation of a right-peripheral (third person) strong pronoun with referential function. Its use here is motivated by an effect of “weak” contrast added to the rheme.

(13) Uncertain (weak) contrast

Michel a dû faire du latin, *lui* (ELICOP, Lui 51)

M. has must.PTCP make of.MASC Latin he

‘Michael, *by contrast*, had to learn Latin.’

The function, documented by (12) and (13), is clearly related to coherence. Even though it is attested for strong pronouns (thereby contradicting the second clause of Detges’ & Beeching’s working hypothesis), this case is very rare. In the entire *Corpus Orléans*, there is just one single attestation of a third-person pronoun of this kind (i.e. (13)), and first-person pronouns with this function are not documented at all.

5.2. The post-rheme construction (Morel 2007)

Apart from the function sketched in the foregoing section (5.1.), right-peripheral pronouns and NPs can serve yet another purpose. This is nicely documented by example (14), which we have already discussed as (11).

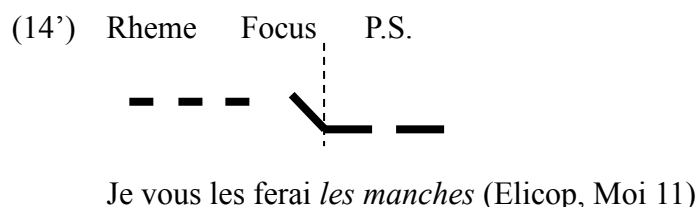
(14) [...] je vous *les* ferai *les manches* (Elicop, Moi 11)

I you 3PL make.FUT DEF sleeves

‘I shall make *them* for you, *those sleeves*’

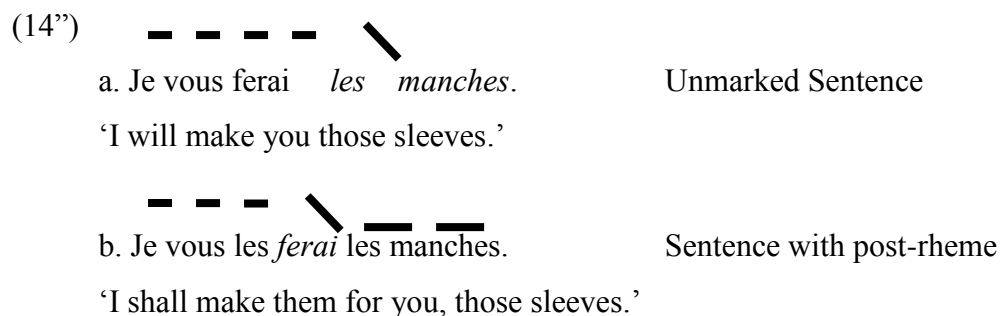
It has sometimes been noted in the literature that sentences such as (14) have an emotive flavour (Nølke 1998) brought about by the repetition of some element of the main clause. According to Morel (2007: 44), this results in a strong (sometimes even polemic) effect of validation of the illocution expressed by the main clause. As Morel (2007) points out, the pattern underlying (14) is a *construction*, i.e. a conventional form-meaning pair. At the formal level, this construction – termed as *post-rhème* by Morel (2007) – combines syntactic with prosodic properties. Specifically, the peripheral element (in example (14) the NP *les manches* ‘those sleeves’) is not separated by an intonational break from the rheme (i.e., the main clause, see above, section 1). In spite of this, the end of the rheme is clearly identifiable by its terminal intonation contour. In French, focus is prosodically marked by a sharp fall or rise in

pitch (see Mertens 2011): a rise in case of an interrogative intonation, a fall if the rheme is an assertive phrase. Since French has oxytonic phrasal accent, the focal intonation contour is always found at the end of a clause, mostly at the end of the rheme. By contrast, the right-peripheral element *les manches* ‘those sleeves’ in (14) is coded under a flat, low-key intonation contour (see (14’)).



The post-rheme construction (Morel 2007)

French is a strict SVO-language. Therefore, in an unmarked French sentence, an object-NP such as *les manches* ‘those sleeves’ is following the verb (see (14’a)). According to Bossong (1981) and Simone (1997), the very point of the post-rheme construction is that it allows the removal of the NP in question from the core clause, thereby allowing the verb to occupy a phrase-final position under focal intonation (14’b).



This analysis has been further refined by Morel (2007). According to her, the terminal intonation contour in (14’’) normally codes information considered as relevant, whereas the low-key intonation contour in the right periphery marks the respective chunk of information as uncontroversial. According to Morel, the effect of the post-rheme construction is a combination of both contours in that it presents the illocution expressed in the rheme *as not negotiable*. Under this analysis, the post-rheme construction speaks to the listener. In other words, it has an interpersonal, modal function.

Unsurprisingly, all of the right-peripheral first and second-person strong pronouns are instances of the post-rheme construction, and among the third-person pronouns only the example given in (13) is an exception. Thus, virtually all strong pronouns in the right periphery instantiate the post-rheme construction.

From what has been said so far, it follows that there are two ways of “upgrading” a strong speech act. Firstly, the speaker has the option of explicitly “anchoring” the speech act in his/her own person by using a left-peripheral strong pronoun, thereby giving it some extra weight. Secondly, s/he can use a strong first-person pronoun in the right periphery in order to present the speech act as non-negotiable. The following example, taken from the *Corpus Orléans*, is a combination of both effects.

(15) *Moi je suis d’ici moi* (Elicop, Moi 316)

Me I am of here me

‘I, I am from here I’

6. Parentheticals

Parenthetical constructions of the type *(moi) je trouve que ...* ‘I think that ...’ have a special discourse function. Normally, they introduce or follow key points of the speaker’s argumentation. In this sense, they are meta-pragmatic operators, and their main purpose is to fine-tune the following (or the foregoing) speech act (Fetzer & Johansson 2010). Given that their function is to inform the listener about how a given conversational contribution should be qualified, they are secondary speech acts with an inherently modal function (Fetzer & Johansson 2010: 242, see also Ducrot 1980). An example is given in (16).

(16) *C’est pas normal. Moi je trouve que c’est pas normal* (ELICOP, Moi 365)

DEM is NEG normal. Me I find that DEM is NEG normal

‘That’s not normal. *I think that* this is not normal.’

The function of these expressions explains their high frequency. Moreover, parentheticals are a preferred context for strong pronouns (see table 2, repeated here for convenience).

	Left	Right
Free uses	160	21
Parentheticals	80	20

Table 2: First person *moi* in the left vs. right periphery of free vs. parenthetical expressions

While the parentheticals under discussion here have traditionally been analysed as mitigating devices (see, e.g., Benveniste 1966, Apothéloz 2003), Fetzer & Johansson (2010) – who do not explicitly discuss the role of strong pronouns – show that parentheticals can in fact function as both mitigators and boosters, depending on their co-occurrence with other discourse connectives and additional context factors (see also Simon-Vandenberghe 2000 for E. *I think*). In the following sections we will show that not only the strong pronouns play an important role in this issue, but also that the question of left and right periphery is crucial to this question.

6.1. Parenthetical expressions with left-peripheral subject pronouns

The variant *moi je trouve que ...* with a strong pronoun is, despite its high frequency, still much less frequent than the unmarked variant with just the subject clitic *je* (see table 8).

Je trouve que	75%
<i>Moi je trouve que</i>	25%

Table 8: Parentheticals with and without left-peripheral strong pronouns

In principle, strong pronouns which are used within parentheticals have the same functions as in free uses elsewhere. A strong pronoun can be used to reinforce both the mitigating as well as the boosting effect of a given parenthetical. Thus, the strong pronoun in *moi je trouve que X* ‘I think that X’ could be used to imply a strong referential contrast (see section 4.1.) between speaker and hearer, thereby inviting an inference of the kind ‘My opinion is X, but you do not have to agree with me.’² In this case, the use of the strong pronoun is motivated by a strategy of (negative) politeness, increasing the mitigating effect of the parenthetical. Unfortunately,

² We thank Kate Beeching for suggesting this case to us.

such a case is not documented in the *Corpus Orléans*. In the following example, the pronoun is used to construe a strong contrast between the speaker's personal belief and a *generally accepted view*. In such a case, it has a clearly boosting effect, because it portrays the speaker's view as particularly original and noteworthy.

(17) En principe la patronne coupe et essaie [...] en dehors de [...] l'apprentie ouvrière mais enfin *moi j' ai toujours trouvé* qu' il était nécessaire euh à l'apprentie de collaborer directement avec elle. (ELICOP, Moi 6)

'In principle, the boss does the tailoring and the fitting without the apprentice, but *I have always found* that it was necessary uh for the apprentice to directly work together with her [i.e., with the boss, U.D. & R.W.].

However, pronouns indicating a referential contrast (strong or weak) are exceptional in our corpus. In fact, (17) is the only unequivocal example in our corpus. Normally, the function of the strong pronoun is to turn the parenthetical into a strong speech act (see section 4.4.), thereby giving it a boosting effect. This is shown in (18), where the viewpoint introduced by *moi je trouve* neither contrasts with a belief held by the addressee (who, in this case, is not an expert on fashion) nor by any of the protagonists mentioned in the previous context.

(18) J'ai habillé la maman et je les ai habillées après pour le mariage du frère [...] alors euh *moi je trouve que ça c'est c'est vraiment de la couture*. (ELICOP, Moi 13)

'I made the mother's dresses and later, I made dresses for them at the occasion of the brother's marriage. Now uh *I think* that's truly couture!'

Thus, more often than not, parentheticals with left-peripheral strong pronouns have a boosting rather than a mitigating function. This means that left-peripheral strong pronouns in parentheticals mentioned in table 2 normally exhibit a modality-related function rather than a coherence-related one.

Table 9 gives an overview of the individual parenthetical expression with left-peripheral strong pronouns found in the *Corpus Orléans*, ranked by frequency. In certain cases, our decision to lump two or more variants into one category may be debatable, in particular in the case of *moi je dis* 'I say' vs. *moi je dirais* 'I would say' and *moi je vois* 'I see'

vs. *moi je vois pas* ‘I don’t see’. However, a discussion of the functional differences between these forms would require a separate investigation.

Moi je <i>trouve</i>	‘I find, I think’	25	31%
Moi je <i>crois</i>	‘I believe’	14	18%
Moi je <i>pense</i>	‘I think’	9	11%
Moi je <i>sais pas</i>	‘I don’t know’	9	11%
Moi je <i>dis/dirais</i>	‘I (would) say’	9	11%
Moi je <i>vois (pas)</i>	‘I (don’t) see’	8	10%
Moi je <i>connais</i>	‘I know’	3	5%
Moi je suis <i>d’avis que</i>	‘I am of the opinion that’	1	1%
Moi j’ <i>estime</i>	‘I guess’	1	1%
Moi j’ai <i>l’impression</i>	‘I have the impression’	1	1%
Σ		80	100%

Table 9: Parentheticals with left-peripheral strong first-person pronouns

6.2. Parenthetical expressions with right-peripheral subject pronouns

The most frequent expression with a right-peripheral strong subject pronoun is, by some margin, *je (ne) sais pas moi* ‘I don’t know’. When used as a parenthetical expression, already its “weak” variant *je (ne) sais pas* functions as a hesitation marker and as a marker of irrelevance (see (19)), highlighting speaker’s lack of commitment to what follows.

- (19) Il faut connaître le détail il faut euh enfin il faut – *je sais pas* – il faut un don, oui, il faut savoir aussi parler enfin. (ELICOP, Je sais pas 2)
 ‘One has to know the details euh you know, one has to like one has to – *I don’t know* – one has to be gifted, yes, one needs to know how to talk, you know.’

Adding a strong first-person pronoun to the right periphery of *je ne sais pas* underscores the speaker’s disinclination to re-negotiate the effect expressed by this sequence, thereby turning it into a strong marker of irrelevance.

- (20) [V]ous avez des livres par exemple sur l' – *je sais pas moi* – la prononciation, l'art de parler, vous savez, l' art d'écrire. (ELICOP, Je sais pas moi 2)
 'Do you have books, for example, on the – *I don't know* – the pronunciation, the art of speaking, you know, the art of writing.'

The ratio between the “strong” variant *je sais pas moi* and its weak counterpart *je sais pas* (see table 10) is quite similar to the ratio of the “weak” vs. the “strong” variant of the expression (*moi*) *je trouve* with a left-peripheral strong pronoun (see table 8).

Je sais pas	70%
Je sais pas <i>moi</i>	30%

Table 10: Parentheticals with and without right-peripheral strong pronouns

6.3. Parenthetical expressions in the left vs. right periphery

Yet another case which we haven't mentioned in section 3 is the option to place an entire expression in either the left or in the right periphery. This is illustrated by example (21) vs. (22).

- | | | | |
|------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| (21) | Preamble | Rheme | |
| | <i>Moi je trouve</i> | (que) cela ne va pas. | BOOSTER |
| | 'I think | (that) this is not o.k.' | |
| | | | |
| (22) | Rheme | P.S. | |
| | Cela ne va pas | <i>moi je trouve.</i> | MITIGATOR |
| | 'This is not o.k. | I think' | |

In cases where the parenthetical appears in the left periphery (21), its effect is a greater illocutionary force carried by the rheme, particularly when introduced by a strong pronoun as in that example. After all we have said about strong pronouns in the left periphery, this effect is expected. However, when the expression appears in the right periphery (22), it relativizes the illocution expressed by the rheme, i.e. it downgrades the latter's illocutionary force. In other words, its function here is somewhat contrary to the effect observed for bare right-

peripheral pronouns (for right-peripheral *I think* this effect has already been noted by Simon-Vandenberg 2000: 50pp.).

An explanation to this apparent paradox arises from the linear order of the respective elements. The centrepiece of the utterance is the rheme, which, as the locus of the illocution, represents the utterance's climax. The respective functions of the left and right periphery are best understood as being oriented towards a successful realization of the rheme. Thus, the expression *moi je trouve que*, as part of the preamble, has the function of preparing the illocution by explicitly indicating that the latter is grounded in the speaker's belief. However, given that anchoring of the illocution in the speaker is obvious anyway, whether explicitly indicated or not, the real function of this expression is to make the hearer aware of the particular relevance of the upcoming illocution, thereby giving it extra weight within the organization of the discourse. If, on the other hand, the expression appears to the right of the rheme, its function with respect to the latter is profoundly changed. To understand this, one has to keep in mind how the utterance would be interpreted *without* a right-peripheral *moi je trouve*. In this (unmarked) case, the speaker will expect the hearer to ratify the illocution of her utterance by the time the rheme has been fully transmitted. If the illocution is accepted by the hearer, it will be added to the common ground, i.e. to the set of propositions agreed upon by speaker and hearer. If, however, an expression of the type *moi je trouve* 'I think' is added to the rheme after the latter's completion, the speaker signals that she does not necessarily expect the hearer to accept the illocution. Thus, by explicitly tying the illocution to her own point of view, the speaker falls back behind a consensus that should have been reached at this point. This argument explains the relativizing effect of a right-peripheral *moi je trouve*. Moreover, it helps us to better understand the profound differences between left and right periphery. This will become clear in the following section.

7. Left versus right periphery

The essential difference between left and right periphery seems to be this: while the elements of the left periphery serve to *anchor* the upcoming rheme and/or the illocution expressed by it, the right periphery is a place where rheme and illocution can be *re-negotiated*. (As we have seen in section 5.2., bare first-person pronouns can be used to underscore that the illocution is *not* negotiable, which in itself is a kind of re-negotiation.) Both functions, anchoring as well as re-negotiation, include modal as well as coherence-related aspects. This becomes clear as

one examines one by one the elements of the phrase model sketched in section 1 (see (1)). *Binding elements*, i.e. expressions like *tu vois* at the outset of the preamble are attention-catchers. Their function is to anchor the upcoming utterance at the interpersonal level by anticipating a consensus between speaker and hearer over the object of the upcoming utterance (Morel 2007: 41). Thus, intersubjectivity is not confined to the right periphery. *Viewpoint elements*, e.g. *moi* in (1) anchor the upcoming rheme in a general perspective, e.g. in the speaker's experience. The various *frame elements* (in (1) *hier* 'yesterday' and *en classe* 'at school') define the temporal and spatial domains in which the rheme is situated. Finally, the lexical topic defines the object to which the rheme pertains. The binding element *tu vois* has a clearly intersubjective and hence modal function, whereas frames and lexical topic on the other hand are clearly coherence-oriented elements.

Reconsidering the various discourse functions of strong first-person pronouns discussed in this article, we find broad confirmation for both hypotheses formulated in the last paragraph. As we have shown, both left and right periphery can have modal as well as coherence-related functions. In both left and right periphery, referential contrast (definite as well as indefinite, see section 4.1.) is a coherence-related function. The same is true for (left-peripheral) topic-shift contexts, where the first-person strong pronoun often serves as an easily available starting point for tracking down the eventual topic (see section 4.2.), thereby anchoring the rheme at the propositional level. In (left-peripheral) turn-taking contexts, the pronoun is used to anchor the following discourse in the respective speaker (see section 4.3.), thereby ensuring coherence at the level of discourse-organization. In strong speech acts, pronouns can strengthen the illocution of the unfolding utterance by anchoring it in the speaker. Contrary to the other context-types discussed so far, first-person strong pronouns have a clearly modal function only in strong speech acts (section 4.4.). In the right periphery, the anti-topic, designed to repair referential gaps, is directed towards propositional coherence. In view of the main hypothesis under discussion here, this could be interpreted as re-negotiating propositional coherence. By contrast, the post-rheme construction, where the validity of the illocution of the utterance is re-negotiated, has a modal (and – more precisely – an intersubjective) function. Thus, it could seem that there is no principled difference between left and right periphery with respect to their capacity to host either modal or coherence-related functions. However, this impression would be misleading. As depicted in fig.1, there is a clear asymmetry between left and right periphery with respect to either type of function. Among the four function types identified for left-peripheral pronouns, only one (i.e. "strong speech acts")

is modal. As we have shown above (see tables 6 and 7), this function type accounts for only 22% of all left-peripheral strong pronoun tokens. However, this clear tendency is blurred by the high frequency of parentheticals (see table 2), where left-peripheral pronouns also have a modal function. In the right periphery, in turn, marking a genuine referential contrast via a pronominal anti-topic is extremely rare. Normally, strong pronouns realized in the right periphery are instances of the post-rheme construction and have a modal function. This asymmetry is captured in fig. 1.

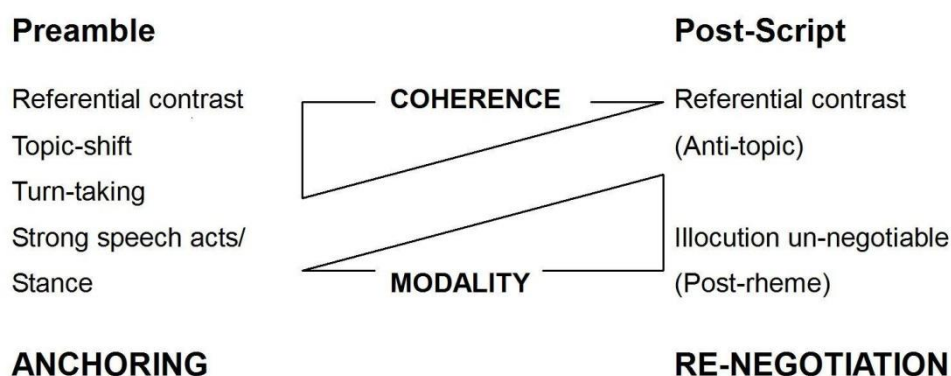


Fig. 1: Left and right periphery and their respective functions

What are the reasons for this asymmetry? Regarding the left periphery, it may be argued that coherence is a basic requirement for discourse. Any utterance needs to be linked to preceding discourse. However, stance is optional, and thus rarer than coherence-related functions. In the right periphery, however, the ratio between coherence- and modality-related functions is inverted. Antitopic is a very particular form of conversational repair, and thus arguably rarer than the more varied forms of illocutionary re-negotiation.

To conclude, our findings for French strong pronouns confirm Beeching & Detges' working hypothesis. The asymmetry between left and right periphery is rooted in the linear unfolding of speech in time. The left periphery represents the beginning of a message. It occurs at a moment where the relevant parts of the message itself do not yet exist. Thus, it is suited to either linking the upcoming utterance to previous discourse or to the speaker her/himself – it anchors the utterance. The right periphery, by contrast, marks the end of a message at a moment where it is manifest to both speaker and hearer. Therefore the right periphery is the natural place to comment on a message, to express expectations pertaining to it towards the hearer, or, very rarely, to repair it after the fact. The coherence vs.

modality/stance contrast sometimes associated with left vs. right periphery items is merely a reflection of the underlying anchoring vs. re-negotiation contrast. Given the linear unfolding of speech in time, this contrast is natural.

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